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"Storm the Kitchen!" Popular Representations of Masculine Domesticity in the Male Cookbook Genre

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Abstract

"Storm the Kitchen!" Popular Representations of Masculine Domesticity in the Male Cookbook Genre

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In a century in which women have achieved the right to vote, gained reproductive freedom, and began to work outside of the home in greater numbers, audiences might expect cookbooks for men, like their mainstream, feminized counterparts, to have evolved from the early part of the century when they debuted to reflect changing gender roles. A sampling of recent cookbooks marketed explicitly to men, however, reveals that the male cookbook genre has a particularly tenacious hold on traditional portrayals of masculinity and femininity. Contemporary cookbooks for men exhibit many of the features Jessamyn Neuhaus describes in her study of male cookbooks from the 1920s to the 1950s.

The resiliency of the genre suggests that the cultural mainstream still believes that men have to justify being in the (home) kitchen because domestic cooking is an inherently feminine endeavor. The cultural work male cookbooks do is highly problematic not only because of the naturalized gender roles they emphasize, but also because of the models of masculinity they offer their readers. After briefly considering the figure of the exceptional male chef, this paper will examine the salient features of the male cookbook genre and the types of masculinity the genre authorizes, as well as how several contemporary male cookbooks portray men, women, and gender relations.

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Over the past several decades, scholars have amassed a large body of critical work on cookbooks as a women's genre. These studies explore the ways in which cookbooks serve as everything from sexist training manuals to autobiographies and sites of resistance for young girls and women.[1] Historians, anthropologists, and sociologists have investigated the various ways cookbooks are used (does one read them cover-to-cover for ideas, or follow recipes exactly?), who they are used by (who must do the cooking, and who has access to resources?), and how questions of literacy, ethnicity, and class inform the texts.[2] Literature and popular culture studies have started to explore the cultural work these texts accomplish through representations of gender, domesticity and race.[3] It has become progressively clear that from informal, fundraising compilations by church groups and schools to the best-selling, multi-edition *The Joy of Cooking* (1931) by Irma Rombauer, cookbooks have shaped perceptions of American womanhood over the past century.

As cookbook editors, authors, and consumers negotiate the changing roles of women in the kitchen, they also reveal a great deal about popular conceptions of masculinity. While ideas of manhood are always at play in the course of general cookbooks, they are more directly explored in the genre of male cookbooks.[4] Vastly less popular than those marketed to women – which, by virtue of established gender roles

[1] see Zafar (1999); Neuhaus (2003); Ireland (1981); Theophano (2002)
[2] see Pilcher (1996, 2001); Appadurai (1988)
[3] see Leonardi (1989); Folch (2008); Abarca (2006)

includes all those not explicitly marketed to men[5] – cookbooks for men emerged in the 1920s and 1930s and became more popular as the century progressed (Neuhaus "King" 192). In "King of the Kitchen," a chapter of her study of gender in twentieth century cookbooks, Jessamyn Neuhaus explores features of male cookery instruction in the post-World War II era and observes that male cookbooks in the 1950s were remarkably similar to those from previous decades. The texts are defined by their explicit goal of carving out a masculine space in what is portrayed as undeniably feminine territory: domestic cooking. To do so, they deploy various techniques that mark the text, the act of (certain types of) cooking, and the male readership as unquestionably, "naturally," masculine. In the process, the books re-inscribe gender norms by portraying women as being ultimately responsible for feeding the family, even though men are capable of much more extensive and creative culinary achievements when they approach the kitchen on their own terms.

In a century in which women have achieved the right to vote, gained reproductive freedom, and began to work outside of the home even in the middle- and upper-classes, audiences might expect the male cookbook genre, like its mainstream counterpart, to have evolved from the early part of the century when they debuted to reflect changing gender roles. A sampling of recent cookbooks marketed explicitly to men, however, reveals that the male cookbook genre has a particularly tenacious hold on traditional

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[4] The genre I identify as "male cookbooks" could more accurately be described as *masculine* cookbooks because they outline specific gender performances rather than features strictly assigned to the male sex. I use the term "male cookbooks," however, in keeping with how scholars refer to the texts I explore.

[5] A quick search on any bookseller's website bears out this observation. Searching for "guys cookbook" will produce a vast number of hits, whereas most of the results for "girls cookbooks," "women's cookbooks," or "ladies' cookbooks" will be juvenile texts aimed at young girls. Editors and consumers alike assume that unmarked cookbooks are, by default, for women.

portrayals of masculinity and femininity.[6] The features of mid- and early-twentieth century male cookery manuals Neuhaus describes are fundamental to contemporary cookbooks for men such as *A Man, A Can, A Plan* (2002), *See Dad Cook* (2006), and *Gentlemen, Start Your Ovens* (2007). *Patio Daddy-O* (2008) is actually marketed on the promise that it will "transport you to those endless days of summer" of the 1950s. Like their predecessors, each of the books normalizes the domestic kitchen as feminine even as they attempt to provide readers with masculine inroads to what is – of course – the "unknown" art of cooking.

The resiliency of the genre suggests that white, middle class American consumers still believe that men have to justify being in the (home) kitchen because domestic cooking is an inherently feminine endeavor. The cultural work male cookbooks do is highly problematic not only because of the naturalized gender roles they emphasize, but also because of the models of masculinity they offer their readers. Within the space of male cookbooks, women are still assumed to be practiced – if uncreative – domestic cooks and men are all foreigners to the home kitchen. Women who do not know how to cook or have no interest in the activity, like men who are competent in the kitchen, are entirely excluded from the discourse. So too are individuals with queer gender identifications, such as those who may not, for example, subscribe to a masculinity defined in terms of wrenches, golf, and car races. Too often, the generic rhetoric also has the effect of objectifying other cultures and alienating non-white readers. After briefly considering the figure of the exceptional male chef, this paper will examine the salient

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[6] For example, women cook on a daily basis to nourish families, while men are occupied with hobbies and careers outside of the home – if they do cook, it is on their own terms, and for festive or exceptional occasions. Women tend to prefer fancy food, while men require hearty food to satisfy their appetites.

features of the male cookbook genre and the types of masculinity the genre authorizes, as well as how several contemporary male cookbooks portray men, women, and gender relations.

Male Exceptionalism in the Kitchen

While male cookbooks may portray men as foreigners to the kitchen, consumers of popular culture know otherwise. Many of the most famous cooks in America, after all, are men: Emeril Lagasse, Bobby Flay, Bobby and Jamie Deen, and Guy Fieri, just to name a few, are all television personalities, cookbook authors, and restaurant owners. A quick survey of the cooking section in a bookstore reveals that men are also actually quite prolific cookbook authors and editors.

As professional chefs, however, these highly visible men inhabit an entirely separate social space than do feminine (or feminized) domestic cooks or bumbling, inept male cooks. As Thomas Adler points out, men are not always portrayed as being alien to the kitchen, but "can be stereotyped as good cooks too, for at the opposite end of the media spectrum is the professional male cook. Professionalism puts the male in a different light; his capabilities are assumed to be great, especially if he works under the name 'chef'" (46). Rather than cooking to sustain themselves and their families, professional "chefs" are conceived of as career artists with refined talents and extensive training. In her study of women chefs, Ann Cooper explains that "when socially prestigious cuisine appeared, it had to be differentiated from ordinary cooking. The way to do that was through disciplined technique and male cooks […] This new 'court cuisine' reinforced the notion that what mothers, sisters, and wives did in the kitchen was ordinary, not professional cooking" (86). Male exceptionalism marks the professional

kitchen as a safe space for masculinity by separating it entirely from the intrinsically feminine domestic kitchen. Cooper goes on to say that "women have always had a strong presence in the kitchen, but never in the upper echelons of the professional kitchen," and cites a 1997 survey in which only 4.3% of currently active certified executive chefs in the United States are women (116, 86). Not only is prestigious cooking a legitimate space for men, but it is also almost exclusively male.

Authorized to be either an expert or entirely ignorant in the kitchen, men who might cook in everyday, *un*exceptional circumstances occupy an uncomfortable, feminized middle ground. Male cookbooks attempt to bridge this representational gap by authorizing circumstances in which men might find themselves cooking domestically without compromising their masculinity. Some do this by appealing to readers who might (want to) consider themselves inept at cooking. These texts assure men that they are "naturals" at the skill and will be creating masterpieces in no time. In this way, the books attempt to authorize masculine domestic cookery as a means by which men go from one extreme to the other: even if they never become professionals, men can still hope to be an exceptional cook at home with signature dishes for special occasions. Other texts navigate this middle territory by describing it as a matter of survival for guys who need to feed themselves and others temporarily, until, presumably, a woman steps in to fill the role. Those male cookbooks that focus on food prepared on the grill posit the kitchen as a necessary evil for food preparation before the masculine task of cooking meat with fire can be accomplished. Still other books imagine more permanent spaces within the domestic kitchen, justified and defined through casual, colloquial language and comparisons to conventionally masculine endeavors such as playing sports or working

with tools. While it is certainly true that many men are comfortable accessing general, feminized cookbooks, investigating masculine cookbooks as a genre affords the opportunity to closely examine the domestic spaces popular representations found in these works authorize for men.

Not for the Faint of Heart: Defining a Genre

The first popularly-produced and widely available cookbooks emerged in the years after the First World War, when books of recipes and cookery instruction started to be distinguished from general housekeeping manuals for women (Neuhaus "The Way to a Man's Heart" 531). In the 1920s and 1930s, cookbooks written by men for men entered the market occasionally, forming the beginning of a genre that would expand quickly in the post-WWII decades (Neuhaus "King" 195). Neuhaus observes that in "the late 1940s and 1950s, cookbooks and recipes intended for men emphasized the same things as did earlier instruction: the differences in male and female food preferences and the creativity of the man at the stove" ("King" 192). This instruction came with "increased vehemence" because the stakes for men were raised: "In the prewar era, recipes for men had helped to define the cooking duties of middle-class, maidless white women. In the 1950s, it helped to define masculinity itself" ("King" 218). Within a Cold War context in which homosexuality was targeted and normative gender roles were touted as imperative for national security, men needed to be secure that any endeavor they took in the kitchen was firmly masculinized. To legitimate men cooking, the authors and editors of male cookbooks "felt it necessary to explain, over and over, the differences between masculine appetites and feminine appetites, differences between masculine cookery and ladylike recipes. Perhaps the differences were not as clear as they, and many Americans, wished"

(Neuhaus "King" 218). Children's cookbooks, which were emerging at this time, underscored similar sentiments about gender roles in the kitchen. Sherrie Inness points out that the "most important lesson boys learned was that cooking was *not* their work. This fact was conveyed to them in many ways, including the dearth of books that were addressed to boys" (128). As with their adult counterparts, the boys' cookbooks emphasized to boys that "cooking was an acceptable pursuit but only in the right situation (an outdoor barbecue) or when 'manly' foods (stew or spareribs, for instance) were being prepared" (129). Meat and other filling food are marked as masculine because they meet the needs of men's voracious appetites. The features Neuhaus and Inness describe about cookbooks from the 1920s into the 1960s are remarkably recognizable in the cookbooks marketed to men today, which suggests that cookbooks for men are not a recent phenomenon but part of a nearly century-old genre.

The most immediately salient feature of male cookbooks is the type of food and food preparation they emphasize. Manly appetites are distinguished from more delicate feminine tastes, and recipes usually feature meat and heartier side dishes. The relationship between men and meat, in particular, is often highly naturalized: "men and meat *naturally* belonged together" (Neuhaus "The Way to a Man's Heart" 541, emphasis in original). Often, texts will reinforce the masculinity of cooking meat, particularly on a grill, by telling stories about early hunters who discovered cooking by dropping meat (often dinosaur) into fire. In these narratives, cavemen either accidentally discover the delicious possibilities of grilled meat, or improve upon cavewomen's attempts to combine meat and fire. These stories are sometimes posited as truth, but are usually told in a light-hearted fashion, as if readers and authors alike accept these origin stories as a

fictionalized ideal. In either case, the male affinity for backyard barbecuing is naturalized as masculine because men have been cooking meat over fire for as long as time, and have always done this activity better than women. Masculine meals are not limited to meat, but extend to other "foods and beverages which stereotypically are thought to be preferred by men: meat and potatoes, pie, coffee, and alcoholic beverages, and to some extent, breads made with corn, rye, or whole wheat" (Adler 47). Contrasted with assumptions about the dainty foods women preferred, the expansive and basic masculine appetite provides a legitimate excuse for men to learn to cook food that will satisfy them. Cookbook writers and editors pair the representations of men's appetites with their natural ability to cook meat over fire to authorize ways of cooking and types of recipes as distinctively masculine.

Kitchen space is also marked as masculine through the rhetoric male cookbooks deploy. The convention of using "pointedly masculine rhetoric" or a "hearty 'Just us guys' voice" can be traced back to the earliest male cookbooks from the 1920s (Neuhaus "King" 192, 197). By using imperatives to "conquer the kitchen," "storm the kitchen!," or "let the kitchen know you're boss," the texts' language reinforces readers' masculinity and place of dominance in the domestic sphere. The actual instructions display a similar aggression, from the "'slosh,' 'clamp,' and 'fling'" that "indicated the fainthearted need not undertake" the recipes in 1950s cookbooks to the "manhandling" and "crushing" found in contemporary editions (Neuhaus "King" 197). By making the act of cooking – from the first invasion of the kitchen to the final fling of an ingredient – sound masculine, "[a]uthors and editors of cookbooks and recipes for men made sure to underscore the *manliness* of their cooking directions and of the man in the kitchen" (Neuhaus "King"

192). The rhetorical aggression equates cooking with physical activity and even battle, but most importantly, it distinguishes the texts from their mainstream counterparts.

Another feature of the genre's rhetoric is its propensity to compare the act of cooking to other stereotypically manly endeavors. Authors and editors draw on sports metaphors or hobbies such as sailing, playing billiards, or painting. In other instances, culinary tools are likened to those used by a carpenter or mechanic, and readers' exploits in the kitchen are compared to building a house or a bridge, or fixing an automobile (Neuhaus "King" 198). In contemporary male cookbooks, the rhetoric extends to the visual, as well, as images of saws, wrenches, and combustion engines are frequently found among recipes. It is also not uncommon for texts to talk extensively about drinking beer or chasing women, simultaneously creating a perception of male community and reminding readers that their male credentials and heterosexuality are in no way compromised.

Like their feminized counterparts, male cookbooks often engage in frequent narratives. Neuhaus argues that the masculine texts from the 1920s through the 1950s actually contained more narrative elements than conventional cookbooks, partly because recipes themselves tended to include "more prose and less instruction than cookbooks for women" and "appeared in an almost novel-like format, including travel anecdotes, personal reminiscences, and lengthy essays on cuisine and fine dining" ("King" 195). While contemporary editions do not omit step-by-step directions, instructions are still very casual and authors engage in the same types of narratives as the texts Neuhaus describes. The presence of personal commentary is hardly a distinguishing feature, since mainstream cookbooks have conventionally included asides and stories by the author.

What separates those in cookbooks for men is that rather than recollections of communal events or acknowledging the influence of friends, narratives in male cookbooks tend to be more individually-focused, often on the author's own credentials and authenticating experiences.

The general way in which cooking instructions are related to male readers reflects another characteristic of the genre: the emphasis on men being "naturally" good cooks. While essentialized ability is most closely tied to competence on a grill, it also extends into the indoor kitchen. Especially in early texts, men are encouraged to cook because of their capacity for creativity: "women leaned on their cookbook crutches, whereas men took chances and 'lived a little' in the kitchen" (Neuhaus "King" 203). Unlike women, who all presumably rely on and never deviate from step-by-step directions, "men approached the kitchen with creativity and natural flair. Men cooked unusual, tasty dishes, and favored hearty recipes with a minimum of 'fuss'" (Neuhaus "King" 197). Even those texts that acknowledged men's inexperience in the kitchen insisted that the ability would come naturally and quickly to any man who put his mind to the task. While contemporary male cookbooks scale back the criticism of women's cooking that trivializes female domestic labor, most texts still underscore the claim that, with a little practice, men can cook as well if not better than their wives, girlfriends, or mothers.

Unlike their wives, girlfriends, or mothers, however, men are rarely, if ever, represented as daily cooks by male cookbooks. Instead, men cook for particular reasons. In the 1920s and 1930s, some cooked to survive, much as they did when their wives had jobs outside of the home in the 1950s and 1960s (Neuhaus "King" 196). They may also be called upon to cook when entertaining special guests or to allow the family to enjoy

the backyard. Several texts even suggest that cooking skills will win a man women's hearts (Neuhaus "King" 200). The trope of men cooking for a reason rather than as an everyday responsibility continues into the genre's present. The reasons have expanded, perhaps, but the normalization of men as only exceptional domestic cooks remains.

At its most fundamental level, the male cookbook genre relies on defining itself as separate from and opposed to conventional, feminized cookbooks. Since it is assumed that domestic cooking is, by default, female, the texts need to render themselves immediately legible as a masculine alternative. Some accomplish this by including the aforementioned graphics of manly objects such as tools, engines, or crumpled beer cans. Others are marked by their physical form and are printed on plastic-coated cardboard and resemble bricks as much as books. Most make use of rugged materials and basic, primary colors instead of feminine pastels. Authors, editors, and publishers also attend to details such as font type and layout to make the recipes appear as manly as possible – sometimes as math equations or flow charts, but often just as simple, "unfeminine" constructions.

While conventions of the male cookbook genre have proven to be remarkably resilient over the past century, they still afford individual texts a considerable amount of play. By looking at four recent cookbooks marketed explicitly to men, this paper explores the various ways in which individual authors and publishers negotiate masculinity in the context of domestic cooking, as well as the ways in which they engage with the conventions of their artistic tradition.

"Have Your Shit Together:" Four Contemporary Cookbooks for Men

Although by now a relatively outdated example, *A Man, A Can, A Plan: 50 Great Guy Meals Even You Can Make* (2002) by David Joachim is worthy of examination

because it is the first in a series of widely popular cookbooks for men. Associated with *Men's Health* magazine, the success of *A Man, A Can* led to the publication of *A Man, A Can, A Grill* (2003), *A Man, A Can, A Microwave* (2004), and *A Man, A Can, A Plan: Second Helping* (2007). The premise of the book – and the series – is evident by the title: men can create entire meals from recipes that rely primarily on canned foods.

A Man, A Can is printed on thick, plastic coated cardboard pages. The cover is designed in bold, dark colors, with the prominent text in all capital letters. The pages are advertised as being "Easy-to-clean," so the consumer is not threatened by expectations of accuracy and cleanliness, hallmarks of feminine, "by the book" cooking. To further mark the text as the territory of men unfamiliar with domestic cooking, all recipes are formulated as math problems with + and = signs, and are illustrated with actual photographs of ingredients. Lest the reliance on prepackaged food signal inferiority, the opening pages define a can opener as the "most rugged utensil in the kitchen" (2). Opening cans, therefore, is a masculine task.

The introduction, titled "Man You Can," is in the form of a persuasive letter to prospective consumers, assuring them that cooking does not necessarily compromise masculinity. The beginning is worth quoting at length:

> "Men don't cook." People tell me this all the time. That's a load of bull – we've been charring giant slabs of meat ever since we discovered fire. The difference now is that we have better things to do. Why slave over a hot stove when we could be cooking up plans for a golf outing? Or warming up at the gym? Or making things sizzle in the bedroom? Here's why:

because sometimes you want a break from the local Burger-Rama.
Sometimes you want a decent home-cooked meal. (np)

With this introduction, the author places the text in the tradition of authorizing men to enter domestic cooking spaces for purposes of survival. He first acknowledges the apparent disconnect between manliness and daily food preparation by contrasting "slaving over a hot stove" against the conventionally masculine activities of playing golf, working out, and engaging in (sizzling) sex. By then assuring the consumer that preparing a "home-cooked meal" is comparable to "charring giant slabs of meat" over fire, the author hopes to demonstrate that in certain situations, a man can cook without falling into the feminine, slaving-over-the-hot-stove category. He goes on to list scenarios in which men are socially authorized to prepare the food, (as long as that food is from a recipe in the masculine *A Man, A Can*): "When you come home from an insane day at work and open the fridge to find nothing but a slice of 3-week-old pizza, remember the can. If the guys are coming over to watch the game and you need some food to throw at the TV, turn to the can. When your girl insists that *you* cook something for a change, you've got it in the can" (np). The text acknowledges that cooking is a necessary time- and money-saving chore that is especially tough and undesirable after a day of work. It also normalizes the convention that the "girl" will usually do the cooking by suggesting that, unlike guys, women have nothing "better to do" than "slave over a hot stove." "Guy meals" remain only exceptions to that norm, thereby reinforcing the idea of the everyday kitchen as feminine.

The text throughout the cookbook is consistently conscious about the image of men cooking. Interspersed with recipes are, variously, a Pamela Anderson joke, a story of

Napoleon Bonaparte, a history of beer cans, and encouragements to drink alcohol (3, 30, 40). Joachim makes use of the rhetoric of the genre, as well. The preparer of these recipes does not microwave food; he "nukes" them. He does not pour; he dumps. He does not fill or place; he stuffs. And he does not crush chips; he "manhandles" them. Almost anywhere readers turn in the book, they are readily assured that masculinity is in no way threatened, and is in fact shored up by cooking in the right way. Commercial success of *A Man, A Can, A Plan* relies on the clear separation between "feminine" daily cooking and masculine survival cooking. That the series has sold over one million copies and appeared on the *New York Times* bestseller list suggests that the distinction is a success ("David Joachim").

See Dad Cook: The Only Book a Guy Needs to Feed Family and Friends (and Himself) (2006) by Wayne Harley Brachman is a more recent example of a cookbook for men that reflects the way the genre now authorizes a broader range of reasons for men to be in the domestic kitchen. Unlike *A Man, A Can*, in which the association with *Men's Health* are all that is necessary to legitimate Joachim, *See Dad Cook* offers readers autobiographical information about Brachman on the back cover. His credentials include previous publications, professional positions at "well-known New York establishments," business ownership, and close association with the famous Bobby Flay. Though clearly part of the exceptional male chef category, Brachman writes for the other end of the culinary spectrum. The title's obvious play on the *Dick and Jane* children's readers – a connection made even more explicit on the back cover with the headline, "This is Dad. *See Dad Cook*. Cook, Dad, Cook." – implies an audience that is largely illiterate in ways of the kitchen. Referencing Dick and Jane, staples in many early- and mid- twentieth

century childhoods, also suggests nostalgia for a time when Dad was not in the kitchen. The book's physical features substantiate the conclusions drawn from its title. Illustrated by very basic drawings of human figures and colored only in shades of orange and blue, the text has a minimalist aesthetic. Instructions are occasionally presented in the form of flow charts, as is the table of contents, suggesting that the cookbook is akin to an instructional manual. Even the graphics that indicate warnings or "pro tips" give the impression that everything about cooking has been simplified into an easily accessible form for men who certainly know more about flow charts and how-to manuals than a kitchen stove.

While the assumed audience, like the readers of *A Man, A Can*, "has never boiled a pot of water," its purposes for cooking are ostensibly different than just survival (10). As the back cover succinctly states, "Sorry, fellas, June Cleaver doesn't live here anymore, and the days when a dad could claim to be clueless in the kitchen and get away with it are gone forever" (back cover). No longer allowed to "get away" with ducking domestic duties, men can turn to *See Dad Cook* as a "survival guide" with "battlefield-tested" recipes from a "real kitchen." In the introduction, Brachman outlines the ways in which fatherhood responsibilities have changed, and encourages men to participate in domestic, everyday cooking activities. Unlike most books in the genre, *See Dad Cook* considers the practical side of cooking, including matters of cost, health, and the emotional value of eating together as a family (Brachman 11).[7] While the book productively intervenes in the genre to extend the range of reasons men can be in the

[7] Brachman occasionally takes an aside to offer parenting advice to readers, such as encouraging children to at least try foods, even if you already have a backup meal cooked. He also illustrates ways in which Dads can include their children in the cooking process.

kitchen to include responsible fatherhood, it still engages in the practice of legitimizing kitchen spaces as masculine.

Brachman uses his prestige as a professional cook to authorize manly spaces in the kitchen. Participating in another convention of the genre, he compares learning to cook with taking up other masculine hobbies:

> So what do you do if you've never filled a pot with water, let alone boiled any? Well, if you want to take up golf, you go to a pro and take lessons, right? Well, lucky for you, I happen to be a professional chef and can teach you the ins and outs of slicing and dicing, sautéing and roasting, mixing and baking. But I'm also a dad, so I know how to cook in the real world. (10)

Men who would not think twice about enlisting the aid of a qualified golf pro can now consider the cookbook as a similar resource. Not only does Brachman's comparison equate cooking with golf, but it shores up his credibility and very much separates professional cooking from cooking in the "real world." In this way, he re-inscribes the idea of male exceptionalism in the kitchen as he uses his prestige to carve out "legitimate" space for men in the domestic kitchen. He encourages his readers to aspire to a form of exceptionalism, as well, by perfecting special dishes that will gather their families around their table. Adler identifies this tendency as the "festal pattern of male cooking" that "generates and maintains a celebratory attitude which shows up in the adoption of specialties, the preemption of weekend meals and guest-dinners, or greater inclinations to experiment" (51). By becoming an "expert" on certain dishes, Dad can be

the prestigious cook of the household and thereby occupy a conventionally masculine space as an "exceptional" cook.

In the preface to the dessert section that closes the book, Brachman assures his readers that baking, like cooking, can be masculine in the proper circumstances: "some guys are intimidated by baking and think that it is strictly the domain of women in the kitchen. Remember, Betty Crocker, the most famous female pastry chef of all time, was a fictitious character, made up by someone in an advertising agency. But the Pillsbury Dough Boy is, and always has been, a real, live person" (200). The Pillsbury Dough Boy is an exceptional male chef figure who instructs women on how to use his products to take shortcuts in their everyday cooking. His authority, symbolized by his chef's hat and manifested through his ability to educate women, reinforces the convention of distinguishing between knowledgeable, exceptional male chefs and uncreative, everyday women cooks. While his tongue-in-cheek authorization of masculine space is certainly meant to be lighthearted, it plays into the generic convention of minimizing women's contribution to the kitchen and assuring men that they can do it better. That the joke is made by a prestigious *pastry* chef, no doubt, lends credence to this suggestion.

See Dad Cook opens up productive space by which fatherhood becomes a legitimate reason for men to engage in domestic cooking. The text reinforces the heteronormative gender dynamics of the kitchen and the masculine space it carves out for its readers is still authorized in terms of stereotypical masculinity, and comes at the cost of displacing feminine culinary abilities.

Published a year after *See Dad Cook*, Tucker Shaw's *Gentlemen, Start Your Ovens: Killer Recipes for Guys* (2007) actually drips testosterone from the shelf. The

spine has red and yellow flames emerging from the bottom to lick at the publisher's name. On the front cover, an illustration of an oven with an open door and flames shooting down the side call to mind the same racing aesthetic the book's title suggests. The exterior of the book is primarily white, red, and yellow on a brown background, and the back displays several plated dishes, along with the quote, "gentlemen, start your appetites…." Linking masculine cookery with both the hobbies of cars and racing and the stereotypically expansive male appetite, the exterior of *Gentlemen, Start Your Ovens* appears to fully embrace the spirit of its genre.

The organization of the recipes and the page layout of the book are constructed to appear extremely casual. Where a word or detail is left out, it is written to the side and an arrow indicates where it should be inserted. Full page graphics of racing ovens and various carpentry tools intersperse the text, and recipe titles such as "joe mama's chicken soup" and "it's the chocolate, stupid" indicate that the author does not actually take these things too seriously, so the reader should not, either. The author translates the French phrase "*mise en place*" as "Have your shit together before you start," again indicating to the reader that he approaches cooking in an ultra-casual manner. (10). Almost every recipe includes a "doctor it up" sidebar, which includes suggestions for varying the meal or making it more elegant – options that a man may choose if trying to impress a discerning woman. At the top of the list of suggestions is a graphic of a hand holding a ratchet to a fork with a bolt of some sort suspended above it. "Tinkering" with recipes, or creativity in the kitchen, is again equated with masculinity.

Perhaps most distinctive about *Gentlemen, Start Your Ovens* is the ways in which it appears to be self-aware of its genre. In just the first paragraph on the front cover flap,

it tells men, “OK, guys – it’s time to get into that kitchen of yours and show it who’s boss” and references Mom’s cooking, ketchup, beer, leftover pizza, potato chips, and ramen noodles, all in entirely positive ways. The overt aggressiveness of the book’s rhetoric – the recipes are “killer” after all, and the introduction is titled, “Storm the Kitchen” – either indicates a new degree of male cookbook rhetoric, or suggests that the author and publisher are aware of both their audience and their genre. Most fascinating, perhaps, are the “atmospheric photographs” by Peter Salvas that occur at the beginning of each section. In each photograph, a different tool is being used in a kitchen setting to prepare food. The two-page spread introducing the breakfast section, for example, shows a hand-drilling hammer, conventionally used for “powerful work such as striking masonry nails, steel chisels, and masonry drills,” being used to crack an egg over a frying pan (“Selecting the Correct Hammer”). The image is diffused in a style popular in contemporary food photography. Introducing the sandwich section is a similarly softened image of a DeWalt handheld circular saw cutting a loaf of bread. Overkill to the max, since DeWalt is one of the pricier brands of power tools available, the image is a potential source of humor for the book’s intended audience. While it is unclear how many men seeking masculine authorization to enter the domestic kitchen are actually familiar with power tools and how many of them just feel more comfortable by associating with them, the thought of cutting bread with a circular saw is not only fabulously impractical, but could lead to some pretty interesting consequences. The scene opening the supper section, of a steak secured to a countertop with a C-clamp, being cut by a wood saw, and the dessert image of a piece of chocolate on a porcelain plate being drilled by a power drill are entertaining for similar reasons.

Gentlemen, Start Your Ovens engages with almost all of the features of the male cookbook genre. It uses casual, masculine language and equates cooking with other masculine endeavors; it emphasizes the male ability to show the kitchen "who's boss," and the introduction is not only a personal narrative about the author but an explication of the reasons why men cook. The author reveals himself to be "one of the guys" whose cooking skills are actually incomplete, even if those "wide-open, even embarrassing holes in [his] skills" are being unable to "flawlessly debone a chicken," perfect his "sabayon,"[8] or cook peanut brittle without the candy clouding up (7). He simultaneously associates himself with his readership while assuring them that he has the knowledge and authority to legitimize certain spaces in the kitchen (after all, how many of his readers really hold a sub-par sabayon against the author?). The book emphasizes that men only enjoy certain types of food by prefacing the salad section with the qualification, "salad? Uh, can I have fries instead? Let me start this chapter by coming clean: salad annoys me," and although the text does not include any recipes for grilling, the omission is acknowledged as intentional: "there are no grilling recipes in this book, because I don't have a grill in my apartment" (95, 6).

Acknowledging its place in the male cookbook genre does not preclude *Gentlemen, Start Your Ovens* from also participating in perpetuating unequal gender relations and undermining women's domestic labor by representing men as exceptional, superior cooks. Shaw tells his readers that following the recipes in his book will allow them to cook in ways "you thought only your mom knew" how to do. After exposing

[8] Sabayon is a dessert made of egg, sugar, and spirits. A mixture is heated over a water bath and whisked by hand continually until it turns into stiff foam. The dish is very difficult to prepare, meaning that the author does not compromise his authority by admitting that his is not "perfect."

that, like his readers, he is not perfect in the kitchen, Shaw asks, "Does that make me just a hack in the kitchen? Maybe so. But give me a hack a knife, some fire, and an idea, and eventually he'll figure something out" (7). Not only does his statement reduce cooking to luck and repetition, but it genders it through the masculine pronoun and the tools the "hack" needs: a knife, fire, and ideas from a cookbook such as Shaw's.

Patio Daddy-O at the Grill: Great Food and Drink for Your Backyard Bash (2008) by Gideon Bosker, Karen Brooks, and Tanya Supina is a follow up to *Patio Daddy-O: '50s Recipes with a Modern Twist* (1996). Both texts, while written by members of both genders, hearken back to the era Neuhaus describes in her work, in which male participation in meal preparation increased dramatically with the introduction of suburbs and the backyard patios those areas afforded. *Patio Daddy-O* explicitly concentrates its attention on the masculine portion of the cuisine: those dishes that can be grilled over a fire.

Not only do the book's aesthetics recall those of mid-century America, its gender politics do, as well. As a book on grilling, the text ensures that its adherence to masculine methods of food preparation is a given, and with recipes for "Mucho Macho Roasted Garlic Rub," "Big Daddy's High-Style Cheese-Stuffed Burgers," and "Male Male Bonding Beer-Brined Chicken," the types of food it offers are marked as especially manly (16-17, 48, 57). In the introduction, the authors discuss the "sheer animal charisma at the heart of the grill experience" and explain that the "rudimentary formula of fire, fork, and foodstuff has not changed since Homer's epic heroes in *The Iliad*" (97, 6). Once again, the fact that male readers are helping with domestic cooking does not necessarily equate their concession to changing gender roles, since nothing has really changed since

ancient men cooked meat over fire. After all, "[a]t heart, every guy is a pyromaniac, and the outdoor pit is where you get away with it. What you can't get away with is performance anxiety" (10). Grilling allows men to have fun with fire, but they are still expected to rise to the occasion, so to speak, because, as the authors suggest, grilling is not just about cooking meat: "[g]rilling is not about satisfying the primary need for food. It's all about a guy's secondary needs: for marking turf, consolidating power, showing off, and staging the timeless host-guest rituals at the base of a community" (8). By marking such behavior as masculine, the text suggests that women do not have the same needs to negotiate their social positions. Instead, it is men who form the "base of a community," displacing women not only from places of prestige within the kitchen, but as hostesses, as well. Within the context of the book – and the male cookbook genre more generally – grilling is about being manly: "it's grilling that makes the man, and if it ain't grillin', it's frillin'!" (8).

While *Patio Daddy-O at the Grill* fits comfortably within its genre, it is distinctive because of the nostalgia it expresses for 1950s American life. The images that are interspersed with the text are largely either photographs of the time period or of artifacts from the era. Gender roles are portrayed in distinctively traditional terms, with white men in chefs' hats "manning" the grill, while women passively observe the men. The text also plays fast and loose with a multiplicity of cultures. Aiming to "spice up ideas from the '50s with the adventurous tastes of today," the book is more successful in replicating imperialist sentiments from the era (front flap). The "Twelve Flavors Fez Blend," for instance, is described as "a paste to rock the casbah – or at least your backyard. The flavors evoke Morocco's mazelike souk itself, hidden and rambling,

mysterious and sensory" (20). Several pages later, the "Self-Defense Asian Marinade," illustrated with line drawings of figures engaging in martial arts, is a similarly stereotyped portrayal of another culture. The section of kebabs, of course, is illustrated with a painting of an Indian woman outfitted in silk and gold, and titled "Bollywood Chicken 'Bobs" (32-33). On the following page, the writers suggest that after one bite of "Tequila King Shrimp Kebabs," readers will – like the mariachi image on the facing page – "sing, 'Though I do not want to, I am going to die of love!'" (34, 35). "Ruskies," Chinese, "Wicked" Indonesians, and Afro-Latinos are similarly subjected to reductive, exploitative representations more befitting the homogenous 1950s than 2008 (38, 39, 54, 67).

Patio Daddy-O at the Grill's racial representations separate the text from the genre not because convention dictates balanced and informed approaches to other cultures, but because the genre is almost exclusively white. References to other cultures are usually limited to labeling any food involving chilies, beans or processed cheese as "Mexican," or recipes calling for soy sauce or ginger, "Asian." *Patio Daddy-O at the Grill* may be more global in its stereotypical representations of ethnic food than other texts in the genre, but it is exemplary of the reductive way in which many male cookbooks represent non-white cuisines. While men of color undoubtedly consume the texts and several author cookbooks for men, they are the exception rather than the norm and are not the genre's primary targets.

The fluidity with which *Patio Daddy-O at the Grill* moves between time periods reflects the ways in which the male cookbook genre has remained largely unchanged since emerging almost a century ago. The sensibilities that inform the text, although

problematic, are those that helped shape the genre by asserting that male presence in the domestic kitchen was a phenomenon that needed to be explained, defined, and conditionally authorized in masculine terms.

Conclusion: Masculine Places in Domestic Spaces

To say that the male cookbook genre has remained largely stable is not to say that it is a static form. As gender roles have changed over the decades, so too have men's reasons for needing or wanting to participate in the domestic kitchen environment. Some texts now identify responsible fatherhood as a legitimate reason for men to cook, while others acknowledge that the reality – and in fact the goal – for many men is not necessarily to marry young and be fed by a dutiful wife. As male cookbooks become increasingly self-aware of their genre, they open possibilities for engaging in productive ways with the forms of masculinity they nonetheless perpetuate.

It is those models of masculine performance that presently need rigorous investigation. The genre represents problematic gender relations, particularly in the domestic context. With few exceptions, the texts assume that readers conceive of women as the natural bearers of everyday cooking responsibilities, while men must have a reason to participate. This reason is often necessity, but is also occasionally guilt or self-aggrandizement. Unlike women, men are to be celebrated for contributing to daily cooking chores because, as exceptions to the rule, their participation is voluntary rather than compulsory.

Because men are "naturals" in the kitchen and capable of much more creative and adventurous culinary endeavors, they have the capacity to displace the woman cook. This happens not only in the case of professional chefs, but also in the exceptional cooking

that takes place at home. Adler explains, "Dad's cooking exists in evident contradistinction to Mom's on every level: his is festal, hers ferial; his is socially and gastronomically experimental, hers mundane; his is dish-specific and temporally-marked, hers diversified and quotidian; his is play, hers is work" (51). Male cookbooks tend to encourage men to become proficient in specialty dishes that can steal the show on special occasions and minimize the daily labor women are still expected to perform. This exceptionalism, furthermore, is not necessarily correlated with skill: "[t]he very fact that Dad usually makes pancakes on Sunday is enough to make Sunday breakfast special to the rest of the family; a successful recipe helps, but is not essential" (Adler 48). Imperatives to conquer, enter, or storm the kitchen, or to "show the kitchen who's boss," can then be read as acts of gendered violence on a traditionally feminized space. If men can step in on occasion and cook better than the women expected to perform everyday – if it is truly that easy – then women's domestic labor is trivialized and deprived of legitimacy. As Inness observes about juvenile cookbooks, these representations "support the belief that cooking is much easier than women make it out to be – plus, it's enjoyable. Thus, they have no legitimate right to complain about their burden of the household tasks" (Inness 132-133). Masculine cookbooks do not leave any room for women who complain about the compulsory domesticity demanded by popular culture, let alone for women who are disinclined, for whatever reason, to cook.

The spaces the genre creates for masculine domestic cooking are not unproblematic for men, either. Constant references to sports, mechanics, carpentry, beer, and women prescribe a type of masculinity that does not reflect the sensibilities and experiences of all men. Additionally, the casual language that helps mark the texts as

manly often carries inappropriate messages about non-Anglo American cultures which not all men would associate themselves. This unproblematized mediation and construction of otherness by heterosexual, white men excludes and alienates men of color. Authorizing certain domestic spaces as masculine, furthermore, does not challenge the gendered divisions in ways that would give men unstigmatized, unmoderated access to the kitchen or other gendered spaces. While men who enjoy cooking and are comfortable with their roles in the kitchen are arguably not the likely consumers of male cookbooks, the representations of masculinity the genre presents have enormous staying power in cultural imaginations.

The male cookbook genre is perhaps usefully read as a response to changing gender roles. When the books first appeared in the 1920s and 1930s, men were trying to come to terms with the increased mobility of women and their changing roles in the household. The texts Neuhaus explores in years after WWII leading into the Cold War reflect similar anxieties about women working outside of the home and resisting social pressure to return to their domestic spheres. Traditional constructions of the feminized domestic kitchen provide a sense of stability even as men are increasingly participating in daily meal preparation. As new gender roles are constantly being negotiated, male cookbooks continue to provide a space in which men can be assured of their masculinity even as they take on new responsibilities.

The presence of so many cookbooks for men on the market suggests that even as social anxieties about men's and women's evolving domestic roles continue to permeate the cultural mainstream, the interest in men participating in home cooking responsibilities is expanding. Whether the books' masculine posturing is in response to social anxieties,

or the maneuvers of self-aware texts knowingly participating in the genre, the cultural work they accomplish is the same. Male cookbooks provide men with authorized, masculine spaces in the home kitchen in which they might find the tools to survive and to excel in what has traditionally been a feminine space, all without fear of compromising their manliness.

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